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Join the club

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Join the club

Student interest propels extensive club sports program

When Miriam Lemnoui called a meeting last year to gauge interest in forming an equestrian club at Furman, she was overwhelmed when 65 students showed up.

Lemnoui, who has been riding horses since she was 9, began pouring her free time into forming the club. With financial help from a donor and from Furman, she was able to arrange for club members to begin taking weekly lessons at a local barn. She also contracted for the services of a trainer.

And in February, a little more than a year after that first meeting, the Furman Equestrian Club traveled to Augusta, Ga., for its first Intercollegiate Horse Show Association competition, finishing ninth out of 11 teams.

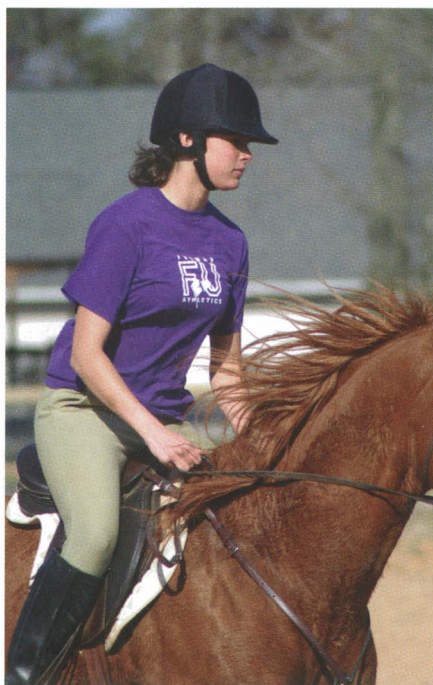
This spring, the club had 22 members. Lemnoui, a rising junior from Ormond Beach, Fla., expects more students to join next year as the club becomes better organized and schedules more competitions.

Equestrian is the newest of 17 club sports at Furman, but from fencing and swimming to ultimate Frisbee and lacrosse, there is an activity to scratch almost any competitive itch. And the number of club teams seems to grow each year. Seven years ago, only a handful of club sports competed at Furman.

About 250 students played club sports in 2003-04, with a few playing on more than one squad, says Owen McFadden, director of recreational sports. Most club participants played sports in high school and are looking for an outlet beyond intramurals. Club sports offer a chance to compete against other schools on a less formal but no less intense basis than varsity sports.

"A school of our size would normally support about seven or eight club teams," says McFadden. "We have so many because we work with the students. If they can show there is an interest in forming a new club, we do what we can to make it happen."

Club teams do have to operate, however, on limited budgets. Because some sports are costlier than others, teams occasionally seek to pad their financial base by pursuing support from alumni or interested donors.



The equestrian program is open to all, from beginners to competitive riders.

McFadden says that through the years Furman has had about two dozen club teams. Some, such as hockey, wrestling, men's team handball and men's volleyball, have folded. The clubs with the greatest staying power have usually been led by Furman employees. Twelve of the current sports are coordinated or coached by faculty, staff or adult volunteers.

For example, Scott Murr '84 and Tony Caterisano of health and exercise science have coached the Running Club and Power and Fitness Club, respectively, for more than five years. History professor Tim Fehler is the Baseball Club manager. Philosophy professor Mark Stone '78 oversees the Aikido Club, and Veronica Yockey of HES helps with the Fencing Club. McFadden coaches women's team handball.

"When you get faculty and staff involved you have strong leadership, consistency and a lot of positive interaction," says McFadden. "And it works out great for the university financially because these are

volunteer coaches. They get paid very little or not at all."

One of the most successful club sports at Furman is rugby, which this year had 50 players on the men's and women's teams. Founded in 1998, the teams play matches in both the fall and the spring. The club hosts an alumni game each Homecoming, pitting current players against past ruggers.

For the last two years the men's team, coached by John Roberts of marketing and public relations, has captured both the Rugby South title and the USA Rugby East Coast Championship. This year the east coast tourney was held in Philadelphia, where Furman beat Central Connecticut State 14-5 in the final. (Watch for more on rugby in the next issue of *Furman*.) The women were 6-2 this year, falling in the Rugby South final to Central Florida.

Women's team handball has also earned its share of accolades. During the last five years the team has finished runner-up in the College National Team Handball Championships and has traveled to tournaments in California, Florida and New York.

"One of the biggest attractions to club sports is the camaraderie you experience by being on a team," says McFadden. "Students enjoy representing Furman and playing against other colleges."

Club sports can also be valuable in recruiting and retaining students. McFadden points out that "lacrosse and rugby are very attractive to students that live in other regions or other countries."

Lemnoui says she knows of seven incoming freshmen who chose Furman, in part, because of the equestrian team. "There is a huge amount of interest here in equestrian," she says. "It's going to be great seeing it grow next year and knowing that I had a part in getting it started."

— John Roberts

To learn more about club sports or to provide support for a team, contact Owen McFadden at (864) 294-2102 or e-mail owen.mcfadden@furman.edu.